

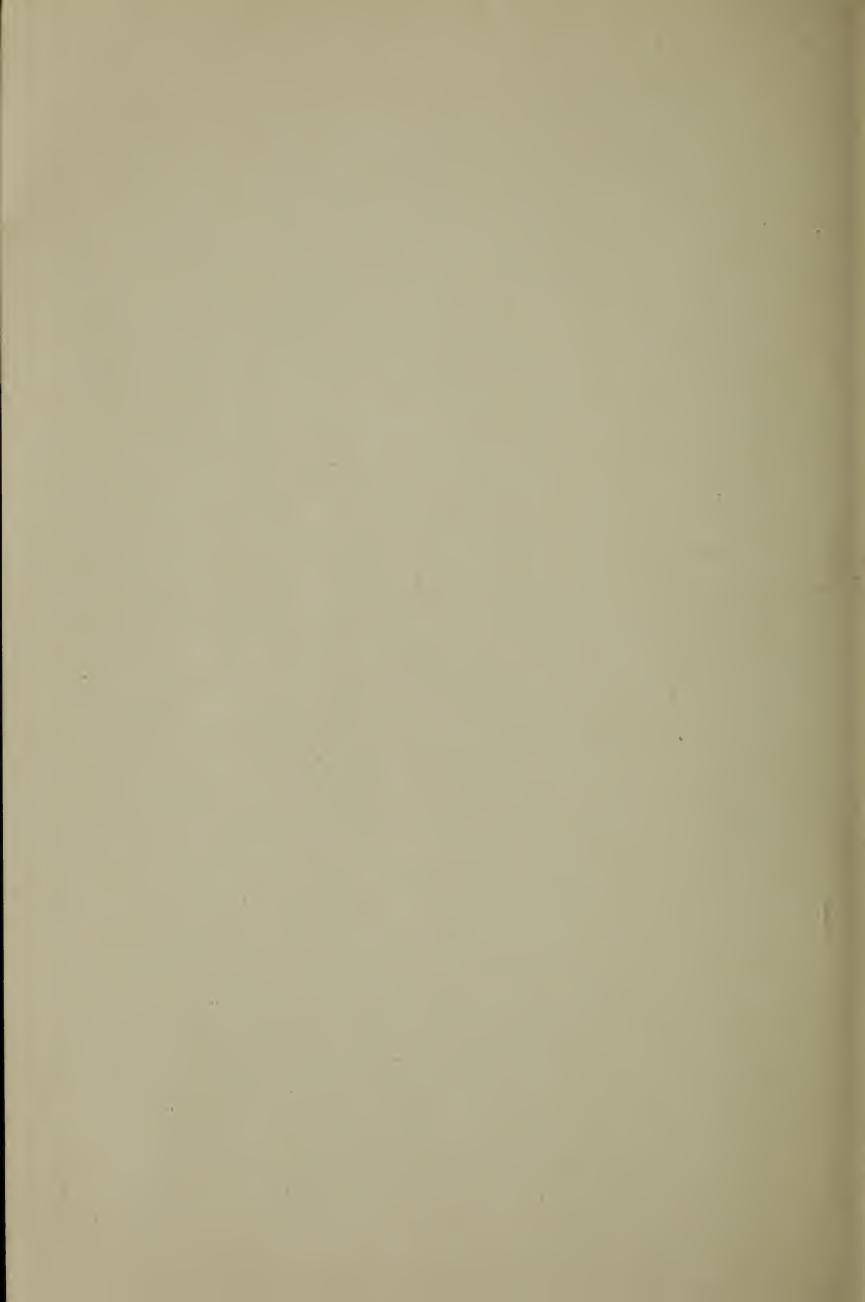
# *Spiritualism*

## AND PSYCHICAL RESEARCH

BY REV. DR. L. RUMBLE, M.S.C.

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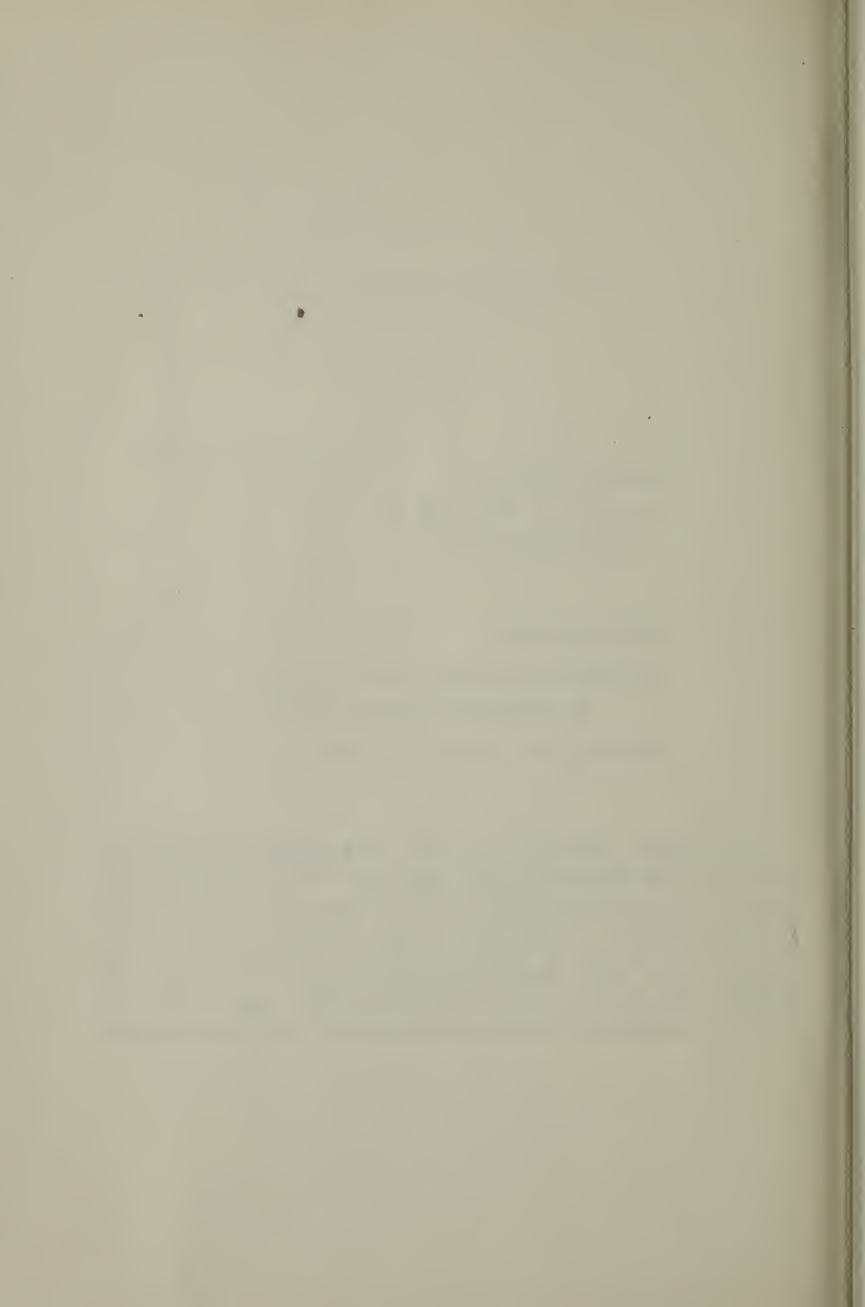
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# SPIRITUALISM AND PSYCHICAL RESEARCH

BY REV. DR. L. RUMBLE, M.S.C.

Spiritualism is not a movement that one can lightly dismiss. It appeals to multitudes of people who have drifted from definite Christian beliefs under the influence of materialism and secularism, but who have not been able to escape the great problems of what man is in himself, and just what happens to him at death. Without the answer of the Christianity they have lost, they are ever on the search for solutions elsewhere.

Certain it is that more and more bewildered people are looking to Spiritualism for the satisfaction of all the yearnings of mind and heart which they have not been able entirely to suppress. Excitedly and eagerly they grasp at it, not bothering about proofs of what they want to believe. No exposures seem to discourage them. A thousand failures count as nothing compared with one apparent and trivial success in the experiments they have made.

The growth of Spiritualism as a modern cult both in America where it originated and in England has been truly extraordinary, although it has made comparatively little progress in Catholic countries. Within ten years of the first table-rapping experiments of the Fox sisters at Hydesville, N. Y., in 1848, America was filled with "spirit-manifestations," whilst an immense literature on the subject, newspapers, books and pamphlets, flooded the country. Margaret Fox, lecturing in New York in 1888, estimated that there were "eight million Spiritualists in this country."

It is impossible to produce anything like exact statistics,

supported by documentary evidence. The official census may reveal comparatively few declared adherents, perhaps not more than 200,000 in America and 150,000 in England. But there are multitudes who profess allegiance to no particular Church, or continue as members of this or that Protestant denomination, yet who are more or less convinced believers in Spiritualism. Seeking consoling reassurances concerning deceased relatives and friends in the beyond, they do not hesitate to attend Spiritualistic seances in the hope that mediums may obtain some message for them. There are, then, literally millions deeply interested today in Spiritualism in one form or another. Speaking of England, Anglican Canon Marcus Knight, of St. Paul's Cathedral, London, said in 1950: "There is hardly a parish in Great Britain of any size where there is not a spiritualist cult of some extent; and in many cases there are Sunday Schools and services carried on in the local Spiritualist Church."

## HISTORY

Necromancy, or the cult of the dead, is of course almost as old as the human race. Primitive peoples feared the spirits of the dead and instituted various rites to propitiate them. The Egyptians, Persians, Greeks and Romans went on to the practice of consulting these spirits, seeking from them auguries and premonitions. In the Old Testament the Jews were warned repeatedly against imitating such practices, whilst the early Christians held them in complete abhorrence. It was not until the Middle Ages that necromancy revived with witchcraft, giving rise to all the severe legislation against it on the part of both Church and State. Modern Spiritualism, however, is an entirely new thing.

In Hydesville, N. Y., in the middle of the 19th century, there lived a simple farmer with his wife and two children,



Margaret and Kate, aged twelve and nine respectively. These two children are the first individuals recognized as mediums in the modern sense of the word. All Spiritualists admit that their experiences, whatever the value of them, constituted the origin of the movement. Thus Sir A. Conan Doyle, addressing a gathering in Queen's Hall, London, on March 31, 1920, made the extravagant statement: "We are here to celebrate the 72nd Anniversary of what Spiritualists consider to be the greatest event which has occurred in the world for two thousand years."

The house in which the Fox family lived had the reputation of being haunted, and various knockings had been frequently heard. On March 31, 1848, when the rappings came as usual, Kate Fox devised a system of intelligent signals, asking the invisible visitant to give three raps for yes, one for no, and two for doubt, in response to questions. These directions were obeyed, so the children said; and thus Spiritualism was born. Neighbors were called to hear for themselves. Wealthy people gave large sums to make public displays possible. And sittings or "Seances" in private circles were arranged, which have become a regular practice among Spiritualists throughout the world.

Forty years later, in 1888, both Margaret and Kate confessed publicly in a New York lecture that they had faked the whole thing, deceiving their own parents as well as everybody else. Later, both repudiated this confession. Probably, being in need of money, they were bribed on both occasions; by enemies of Spiritualism in the first place; by Spiritualists themselves, among whom mediumship had become big business, in the second place. All that can be said is that no reliance whatever can be placed on either of the declarations. The repudiation during the New York lecture, however, was at once published by Reuben Briggs Davenport in a book en-

titled "The Death Blow to Spiritualism." He was utterly mistaken in his optimism!

Spiritualism arrived in England in 1853, when two American mediums named Mrs. Hayden and Mrs. Roberts went to London and began to attract many people to their seances by advertising "Communications from Departed Friends."

After them, came a far more important person, Daniel Dunglas Home (1833-1886). Home was born in Scotland, but was taken to America at the age of ten, where he first manifested extraordinary psychical gifts. He returned to Europe in 1855 and there, in his seances, not only relayed "spirit-messages," but produced amazing physical phenomena, some of which have never been duplicated. There can be no doubt that Daniel Dunglas Home was the most gifted and successful medium known to history. Even under the strictest conditions imposed by the great scientist Sir William Crookes he gave the most startling demonstrations, the reality of which could not be disputed, whatever their explanation might be. And it was he, more than any others, who popularised modern Spiritualism—not as a religion, but as a system of necromancy or attempts to communicate with the dead.

In previous ages no one had doubted that the dead could, and sometimes did appear, either for the sake of manifesting their own needs, or for the sake of giving warnings of various kinds to the living. But such appearances were occasional only, and not at our own bidding. What was new about this modern Spiritualism was the doctrine that on our own initiative we can get in touch with any departed spirits we please, and that with the help of suitable mediums there can be an organized and regular system of communication with them. Seances multiplied, and extravagant claims were made for the authenticity of the innumerable "spirit-messages" that were said to be "coming through" from the beyond.

## POPULAR APPEAL

Many factors have contributed to the remarkable growth of Spiritualism. It broke upon a religious scene in America swarming with cults, with people constantly exchanging one for another in a perpetual search for novelty. It is not surprising that the extravagant claims of Spiritualism proved so attractive. It was all very exciting and intriguing. Eager interest and man's insatiable curiosity about the occult brought many to seances as to a new form of entertainment and investigation.

At the same time there were those who sought more than mere entertainment. They had drifted from orthodox Christian beliefs, yet felt materialism to be not enough. They could not believe that life means simply "to be born, to suffer, and to die." There must be more in it than that, a meaning, a lasting significance to all that we value most; and they hoped to find in Spiritualism a satisfaction of their desires for a future life.

Others were moved by pathetic longings to receive tidings that their deceased loved ones still survived, and they eagerly grasped at the experimental proof that Spiritualists claimed to offer. This mood was to be very much deepened and intensified later on by the shattering experience of the two World Wars. And the "spirit-messages" were indeed consoling. Always the voices came that their owners were much happier where they were than they had been in this life.

Doubts as to the reliability of spiritualistic explorations generally were allayed by the fact that, from the 1880s onwards, eminent scientists and literary men of University standing took Spiritualism seriously enough to form the Society for Psychical Research in order to make an impartial and objective examination of its results. The members of this Society had a purely scientific and not a religious interest in

Spiritualism; but their devoting attention to it at all gave it a prestige it ill-deserves and greatly helped its growth even as a religion. Christianity had attributed nearly all its phenomena to diabolical influences and had denounced it as dangerous and unlawful. Now it seemed that there was no danger, and that the new discovery was one of the blessings of science, enabling us to speak with loved departed ones.

So ever-growing numbers flocked to seances, with the will to believe very strong within them. Devotees were prepared to accept quite credulously any so-called messages which fitted in with what they would like to be true, and to be uncritically impressed by such phenomena as it might be given to them to see with their own eyes, hear with their own ears, or even touch with their own hands.

## THE SEANCE

To get in touch with a disembodied spirit, or rather with a "spirit" who knows the "spirit" one wants to contact, a "medium" is always required. A medium is a person of a highly-sensitive temperament—usually in fact called a "sensitive"—who can readily enter into a self-induced trance. During the trance the "conscious mind" becomes inactive, whilst the "subconscious mind" takes charge and becomes receptive of psychical influences, often with astonishing results.

To be a medium one does not have to be a deeply spiritual or saintly person, nor of a highly-developed intelligence. There are of course some mediums who are intellectually gifted and at least good moral character. But such qualities are not essential. One has only to have a capacity to be tuned in to the spirit-world, to be sensitive to impressions received, much as a photographic plate or film is sensitive to light. Sir Oliver Lodge admitted that the average medium is ill-educated and of low intelligence as a rule. Why the "spirits" should



prefer such types is a mystery, and must be left unexplained.

Mediums claim to be able to get in touch—indirectly, as we shall see—with almost any discarnate spirit at will, from Adam to the soul of the last one who has just died. The reason given for this is that departed souls are ever seeking to tell us of themselves and of conditions beyond the grave, and will therefore make use of any medium according to the degree of his or her sensitivity.

At a seance the room must be darkened because light makes it more difficult for the medium to lapse into a trance, and also because, for some mysterious reason, tends to alienate the "spirits" themselves. Unfortunately, the darkness also makes critical observation of the proceedings more difficult for those who are present.

From the lips of the medium an entirely new voice is heard. Spiritualists claim that in a seance there are four personalities at work; "on this side" that of the "inquirer" or "sitter," and that of the "medium"; "on the other side" that of the medium's "control," and that of the "communicator" or that of the deceased person being interviewed. The medium, therefore, is our bridge on this side to the spirit-world. The "control" is the bridge on the other side to this world, used by the discarnate spirit we want to contact.

The "controls" as a rule claim to be the spirits of deceased Red Indians, with names such as "Red Feather," "Moonshine," or "White Eagle." Occasionally we may have an American colored girl, as "Feda"; or for a change the spirit of some ancient Egyptian.

In explanation of this Margery Lawrence tells us, in "What is This Spiritualism," that Red Indians were a highly-advanced race who originated in the lost continent of Atlantis. Warned by spirit guides of doom, they fled to North America, Egypt and Peru, carrying with them memories of one of the

greatest of civilizations. From among them, therefore, most "controls" are drawn. One could wish for some documentation in support of this fantastic theory! Meantime, one can be forgiven for suspecting that the preponderance of Red Indians merely indicates that the very idea of the "controls" was itself the thought of American Spiritualists. English Spiritualists have slavishly adopted "Red Indian Controls." Had they, however, originated the idea, surely the ancient Druids would more likely have occurred to them!

To explain why messages are often inadequate, confused, and even ungrammatically-spoken, mediums say that there are incredible difficulties in the way of "getting through." The control may have the mentality of an illiterate colored girl, as in the case of "Feda." Also when one considers the series of channels, the "departed soul" having to give the message to the "control" who in turn must try to impress it on the brain-substance of the medium, and through this brain-substance make use of the medium's vocal organs to render the message audible and comprehensible, it is not surprising that there are obscurities.

Trivial personal details are usually given in a hit or miss kind of way to enable sitters to identify those with whom they seek to communicate; and sometimes these may seem astonishingly right. After about an hour, the "control" announces that the power is failing and says goodbye to all, with expressions of goodwill; and with a sigh the medium awakes, quite unaware of anything that has happened.

Psychical research workers have not been impressed by the nature of the messages received, which have added no new facts of any real value to the sum-total of human knowledge, and have made no contribution to scientific, social, religious, or moral progress. Also it seems incredible that those who were intellectually-gifted in this life, fine thinkers, should

have so degenerated in the spirit-world that they cannot say anything really worth saying. As C. E. M. Joad remarked: "If ghosts have souls, they certainly have no brains!"

For these as well as other reasons, most scientific investigators deny that the messages come from the spirit-world at all. They believe that mediumship is a result of natural but as yet little understood psychical laws. The trance is a form of self-hypnotism, during which the subconscious mind of the medium is able to enter into relationships with the subconscious minds of the sitters. But of that we shall see more later.

## PHYSICAL PHENOMENA

At an ordinary seance experiences do not as a rule go beyond those just described. But at times extraordinary phenomena of a physical and tangible nature seem to have occurred. Objects at a distance may begin travelling round the room of their own accord. Musical instruments with no one near them may begin to play. On rare occasions levitation may be witnessed, the medium being raised above the floor and remaining suspended in mid-air with no visible means of support. Or — it has been said — "materializations" may take place, a human form, or part of a human form, a face, hand or foot, seeming to come out of the body of the medium, the material forming the image being called "ectoplasm." At times it is claimed that the image has not only been seen but handled, giving all the signs of being a real body, or part of a real body.

The nature of most of these phenomena has been hotly debated. Probably the most widely-accepted explanation is that all such experiences have happened only in the minds of the witnesses. The darkness of the seance-room, the sense of expectation in the sitters themselves with the critical faculty non-existent and reason no longer in control, the hypnotic

powers of the medium — all these have created a hallucination in those present.

But whilst this could be true of untrained observers — no one denies that — it would be difficult to maintain in the case of the trained investigators of the Society for Psychical Research. So sane a scientist as Sir William Crookes declared that the medium Florence Cook made a spirit named Katie King materialize on many occasions in his presence, with every scientific test applied to exclude fraud; and that he himself not only saw and heard her speak, but touched her, and photographed her forty times with different cameras. He never swerved from his conviction. We cannot dismiss his testimony, as well as that of other equally-qualified observers, as negligible, although their interpretations of such phenomena are not necessarily correct.

Houdini, in his book "A Magician Among the Spirits," declared that he wanted to believe such things proved the existence and powers of surviving souls but that, after twenty-five years of intensive study, he was convinced that they were the result of clever trickery on the part of skilled mediums. Certainly he himself, by his extraordinary natural powers, performed feats which the most exacting and critical observers declared to be impossible. But investigators say that there are things beyond any of Houdini's experiments and that his explanation by no means solves all problems. There is still much not so easily accounted for, and which may never be solved.

Spiritualists, of course, insist both on the reality of such physical phenomena and that discarnate spirits are responsible for them. They have even claimed that photographs taken with ultra-violet rays have shown "spirits" supporting a medium during "levitation"; but scientific investigators have declared to be very poor such evidence as they have



been able to offer for this.

Scientists devoted to psychical research say that it is not *impossible* that physical phenomena could be produced at a distance by psychical forces emanating from the medium's or from the sitters' personalities, although this is far beyond anything one would normally expect. More and more we are becoming aware that queer things bubble up from the sub-conscious mind-stuff. If such things could be *proved*, conceptions of modern science would be revolutionized. But nothing that could really be called proof of such natural powers is yet available.

Catholics, of course, know that extraordinary physical phenomena have occurred in the lives of the Saints. These are usually explained either by diabolical power, or by divine intervention. St. John Baptist Vianney, the Cure of Ars, suffered from physical assaults which he himself attributed to the devil; and there is no sound reason for doubting his judgment concerning the source of them. Other physical phenomena, out of all proportion to the capacity of any natural causes, and wrought either for the benefit of humanity or as a testimony to the holiness of a particular person, must be regarded as miraculous and wrought by the power of God. Even granted a natural psychical explanation of *some* of the extraordinary physical phenomena thought in a less-enlightened age to be preternatural in origin, not all such phenomena, certainly, could be explained in such a way where the lives of the Saints are concerned. (1).

## THE QUESTION OF FRAUD

A few words must be said here about the whole question of fraud. There can be no room for doubt that it has abounded among Spiritualists. One of the greatest of investigators, Mr. Harry H. Price, did not hesitate to say that 99% of the

(1) For a discussion of this subject, see "The Two Stigmatists, Padre Pio and Teresa Neumann," (1957), by Rev. Charles M. Carty. Radio Replies Press, St. Paul, Minnesota, U.S.A.

phenomena produced by mediums is either consciously or unconsciously fraudulent, and that but 1% of them can be accepted as genuine. There have been innumerable proofs of even fraudulent psychic photography, with consequent retractations and admissions that the camera *can* be made to lie.

Sir Oliver Lodge, writing in the "Encyclopaedia Britannica," points out that belief in the phenomena demands acceptance of people's claims to be endowed with special faculties as mediums. Many people who do not really have such faculties have falsely claimed to possess them. Again, many who do really possess them, and can truly be called "psychic," are tempted to resort to trickery when nothing genuinely happens, either not to disappoint eager clients, or for the sake of their own prestige and financial needs. After all, in many cases mediumship is a profession, in which one's livelihood depends on getting results. A constant watch is necessary, therefore, warns Sir Oliver Lodge, if the whole spiritualistic movement is not to be brought into discredit.

It is not surprising, then, that so much fraud should have led catholic writers such as Liljenkrants, De Heredia S.J., Dr. J. J. Walsh, and others, to deny anything genuine in spiritualistic phenomena, and to regard all as a clever fake. (2).

However, none have deplored dishonesty among mediums more than serious Spiritualists themselves, who really desire the actual facts to be verified if possible by psychical research. These insist that there are some duly qualified mediums who are of the utmost personal integrity, accept no fees, and are more than willing — as far as it can be done — to submit to the most rigidly scientific conditions for purposes

(2) Father C. M. de Heredia S. J. felt compelled in his later writings, as in his Spanish work "Los Fraudes Espiritistas y los Fenomenos Metapsiquicos," (1931), to modify his views in this matter.

of observation.

But further difficulties here arise from the fact, already mentioned, that an excellent medium, above all suspicion of *conscious* fraud, may *unconsciously* resort to it. In the temporarily dissociated and hypnotic state, the subconscious mind of the medium might receive the suggestion from the mind of a sitter thinking that here surely deception will occur, and act accordingly! There is no guarantee that this will not happen. Or again, "spirit-controls" — if they exist — might be maliciously inclined towards a particular medium and prompt fraud for the undoing of the medium.

Despite all these reasons for caution and close scrutiny, however, it seems that the "nothing but trickery" idea can no more stand than the "wholesale devil theory" of writers like Godfrey Raupert in "The New Black Magic." Father Mainage O.P., with first-hand experience in psychical research, did not hesitate to write: "Is it possible without falling into an absurd extreme of hyper-criticism to refuse credence to the confidences made by word of mouth of people whose mental balance, good faith, and high level of intelligence are beyond all question? To myself, as Priest and Religious, it has happened — if I may for once be pardoned the introduction of my own modest testimony — to come into contact with such witnesses; and I admit, very simply and without waiting for the final word of science, that I believe in the objectivity of spiritualistic phenomena. There are tables which turn and which talk. Mediumistic script is not the figment of a crazy imagination. Apparitions are not all of them the result of unreal hallucinations; and the partial materializations obtained by Dr. Geley are not a pure chimera." (3).

Yet granted the objectivity of certain phenomena, the problem still remains of interpretation and explanation. Is all

(3) "La Religion Spirite," p. 87.

due to unknown and entirely natural psychical forces of the human mind? Or if it be due to "spirits," to what "spirits?" Those who take it for granted that they are the souls of those whom they once knew may be grievously mistaken. Other "spirits" may be acting the part; and Spiritualists themselves admit that impersonations are always being attempted. The medium's "control" could easily be a "lying spirit," utterly unscrupulous. And there are no reliable means for checking this.

Father Thurston S.J. points out that any "direct voice", with accent, tones and modes of expression exactly the same as those of a person we knew, must be a *counterfeit* voice; for, however worked, it cannot come from a larynx long since crumbled to dust, or reduced to ashes by cremation! So, too, although Sir Oliver Lodge claimed that he saw his own son's features clearly in a "materialization," the face he saw was certainly not the actual and already decomposed face of his dead son Raymond. It could only have been a *simulacrum* or imitation; and therefore not proof that his own son really stood before him. Spiritualists themselves are still left in uncertainty.

## DANGERS OF SPIRITUALISM

Many of the older-type books written against Spiritualism may seem to the modern reader to be almost hysterical in their warnings against the cult. One cannot help feeling that they spoiled their case by exaggeration. But there are dangers associated with such efforts to get in touch with the spirit-world, dangers to mind, soul and body. These are not orthodox bogies. They are the warnings of specialists themselves, of men like Sir Oliver Lodge, Sir William Barrett, and other psychical researchers; and it would be foolish to ignore them.

Take firstly the question of mental derangement. This



particularly threatens those who act as mediums; and there are not a few instances where these have ended in complete insanity. To allow the *subconscious* to become operative, it is necessary to remove the *conscious*. This is done by a self-induced trance so that the subnormal may come to the surface. But already this is to be in a pathological condition. To have the conscious mind "de-ranged" is the essential stuff of madness; and continual indulgence in experiments of such a kind can end in chronic insanity; and has often done so.

Sitters themselves, apart from the danger of becoming fanatics, living for relationships with a spirit-world for which we are not naturally fitted whilst in this world, can have their reason unsettled and become victims to imagination and superstition through the constant play of their emotions. Also, since mediums vary and are often quite wrong in the information they dispense, the judgment of credulous clients can be seriously misled, with most unfortunate results from acting in practice according to completely erroneous advice.

Morally, the most evil counsels have come at times from the lips of mediums, opposed not only to religious teaching but also to sound natural ethics. Were one to grant the claims of Spiritualists that they are indeed in contact with "spirits," one would be justified in declaring such spirits "evil entities," and frequent dealings with them to be the high road to diabolical possession.

Physically, Sir William Crookes admitted that mediums were often affected by painful nervous disorders and bodily prostration as a result of their experiences, and that the health of many addicts frequenting their seances suffered similar deteriorations.

Many experienced Spiritualists, apart from all religious scruples, have therefore abandoned Spiritualism and warned against it. Thus Mrs. Travers Smith, who for twenty years

was a remarkably successful medium, abandoned it entirely and wrote in her book "Voices from the Void," p. 138: "If I may venture to advise persons who long to speak once more with those whom they loved who have vanished in darkness, I should say it is wise and sane not to make the attempt. The chances against genuine communication are ten to one; the disappointments and doubts connected with the experiment are great . . . I fear the observations I have just made may be very distasteful to many who approach the subject from the spiritualist point of view. I cannot offer these people any apology for my attitude."

Investigation of the occult—if made at all—should be left to able and balanced people, qualified scientists, who are able to judge the worth of a medium and form a sound estimate of the phenomena and alleged messages from the spirit-world. But nervous, unstable and credulous people, who tend to give more evidential value to the enthralling experience of trafficking with the "souls of the dead" than is warranted, and who in any case are not actuated by right motives, should have nothing whatever to do with Spiritualism and its seances.

## PSYCHICAL RESEARCH

Strangely enough, although psychical research may end by refuting the Spiritualists' claim to have got into contact with discarnate spirits, it was Spiritualism which gave birth to the new science.

When the remarkable medium Daniel Dunglas Home, who had created a sensation by the astonishing phenomena he was able to produce, was accused of fraud, his exploits were most carefully investigated by the Cambridge scholar, Mr. F. W. H. Myers, and by Sir William Barrett, of Dublin. These men refuted the charge of fraud in Home's case, although they declared quite inexplicable much that he was able to ef-

fect. Reasonably they said that, although one might agree or disagree with Home's own explanation that he had the assistance of discarnate spirits, no one could declare the phenomena unimportant. They demanded careful study of such things by scientists, and a deeper inquiry into psychical powers and para-normal activities associated with the human personality. In other words, psychical research was necessary, and sooner or later it would have to be regarded as a legitimate branch of science.

In 1882, therefore, the Society for Psychical Research was founded in Cambridge, England, by F. W. H. Myers, Edmund Gurney, and Sir William Barrett, under the Presidency of Professor Henry Sidgwick. In 1885 a branch of the Society was established in America by William James; and similar Societies exist in nearly all countries today.

The members had to be men of ability, and of sufficient training and integrity to be able to make fair tests and get honest results. They undertook to study the possibility of human faculties beyond the normal, which might be able to function independently of the senses. The approach was to be scientific, not religious; and all philosophical presuppositions were to be put aside. It was to be a matter of verifying "facts," of discovering the laws connected with them, and of bringing them within organized human knowledge.

The collected evidences of psychical phenomena have been published regularly from the very beginning in the "Proceedings" of the Society for Psychical Research, and the accumulated mass of material is formidable indeed.

The pioneers of psychical research were courageous men, for they had to face unpopularity with orthodox scientists who ridiculed Spiritualism and all its works, declaring it an outbreak of savage superstition and folklore quite unworthy of scientific attention. Most scientists refused to investigate

the doings of a cult so generally derided. Naturally, a stubborn scientific fight against the admission of any paranormal happenings was to be expected, since these did not fit in with the existing scheme of science but suggested an order outside accepted materialistic notions of the physical universe.

## STRICTLY SCIENTIFIC

What hostile critics overlooked was that the Society for Psychical Research had no intention of identifying itself with Spiritualism. The members were willing to study the phenomena, but not to accept the spiritualistic explanation of them as being due to discarnate spirits. They wanted to study scientifically all abnormal mental states, feats of memory, hypnotism, auto-suggestion, telepathy or thought-transference, and any other manifestations of the mysterious and latent powers of the human mind. For this reason, most of them disliked the word "Spiritualism," and preferred a non-committal word such as "parapsychology," or the study of things outside normal psychology.

It is true that some scientific investigators, like Sir William Crookes and Sir Oliver Lodge, accepted the "spirit-hypothesis" and became persuaded that communication with the dead was possible. But they professed that as their "theory" only, not claiming that it had been scientifically demonstrated; many other members of the Society for Psychical Research, after a critical examination of Spiritualist claims, dismissed them as worthless.

Needless to say, the Catholic Church is in no way opposed to psychical research so long as it confines itself rigidly to the scientific field, avoiding religious associations. God gave us our reason, expecting us to use it, and by doing so to arrive at such natural knowledge as is possible to us. Cardinal Manning did not hesitate to join the Society for Psychical Re-



search, rightly regarding it, not as an association of Spiritualists, but as an association of scientists.

The Society has devoted itself to the investigation of all kinds of reported events which seem beyond the power of ordinary physical causes. These include cases of telepathy or thought-transference from mind to mind; clairvoyance, or the ability to know things beyond the range of the senses of sight, hearing and touch; psychometry, or getting information about people merely by holding some object belonging to them; precognition, or the foreseeing of future events; psychokinesis, or the moving of physical things by mental activities only; accounts of apparitions and hauntings, and many other aspects of the subject the description of which would not be possible within the limits of a booklet of this size.

Results have not been very definite. Research has proved many claims to extraordinary phenomena false, accepted a few as true, and left the reliability of the rest an open question. Professor J. B. Rhine's experiments at Duke University in the Department of Parapsychology seem to have established telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition and tele-kinesis in a very limited degree to be facts, although the nature of such powers is not yet understood. The tendency is to explain them by extra-sensory powers in that deeper area of the human personality called the "subconscious," and by holding that, in some obscure way, the spirit or soul of man is able at times to act independently of the material body, at other times to use abnormal magnetic forces belonging to the material body, but hitherto unrealized.

Explanations are so vague and inconclusive that scientific laws cannot yet be formulated for man's psychical activities and the whole subject is, therefore, still debatable.

## DIFFICULTY AT SEANCES

Particular difficulty attaches to anything like a scientific study of psychical phenomena which are said to occur during spiritualistic seances. There is plenty of hearsay evidence of remarkable happenings on such occasions, which may or may not be due to wishful thinking. All that can be said is that if such trings are realities, they would certainly appear to be quite different from the mechanical objects and events studied by ordinary science.

The great difficulty is, however, that the best psychical phenomena are possible only in the most sympathetic circles, which excludes the cold, dispassionate spirit of scientific inquiry; and in a dim light as opposed to the clear conditions required for careful and close scrutiny.

It is doubtful, therefore, whether a body of detached scientists ever *could* witness a "materialization" at a spiritualistic seance. According to the "spirits"—so say the Spiritualists—the material for these apparitions is derived from the "etheric bodies" of all present at the circle, who must lend themselves to all that is taking place. Such a phenomenon will not occur unless the group is sympathetic, and the presence of emotionless, unsympathetic and critical scientists would render it impossible. If that be the case, the only evidence to be had for such "materializations" will be that of the testimony of witnesses who were in a highly-strung, emotional and almost pathological state at the time of the alleged occurrence.

Nevertheless, there are those who hope for great things from psychical research. Materialists have long held that there are no grounds for belief in the existence of a spiritual soul in man which can survive the death of the body, which has its own independent value in the sight of God, and which will answer to Him in judgment for its life in this world. Pro-

fessor Harry H. Price, of Oxford, believes that the scientific and experimental study of paranormal phenomena will force a re-thinking of the whole problem of man's mysterious being, and will eventually bridge the gap between the material and spiritual worlds in a way no truly scientific man will be able to reject.

## SCIENCE AND SURVIVAL

The Christian religion teaches that our soul, our "thinking-self," will survive the death of the body. Man as a whole is, of course, body-soul composite. But the soul, an immortal spirit, cannot perish with the body but will continue to exist after the death of the body, and still be able to know and will things in its disembodied state.

With their driftage from the Christian Faith, however, this religious belief fails to carry weight with many people, and for them whether the soul survives or not has become a problem to be solved by other means, if possible.

Apart from religion, of course, there remained the purely philosophical arguments, concluding to the spiritual nature of the soul, and therefore its immortality, from the immaterial nature of thought-processes, and from the permanence of the "thinking-self" through all the changes of body elements from childhood to old age. Then, too, since justice is not always realized in this world, it must surely be fulfilled in the next; and *we* must be there to experience it.

But these considerations were declared to be inferences based on ancient ways of thinking no longer acceptable to the modern mind. Something more tangible and scientific was wanted. And Spiritualism professed to supply the required experimental proof by actual contact with disembodied souls who had already passed over into the next world.

Most of the so-called proofs from spiritualistic seances, for

the most part embedded in uncritical anecdotes, are quite useless. But there are better varieties, ranging from identification of a given "spirit" by items of personal information, to the exceedingly complicated test of "cross-correspondence." This latter test was devised by Professor Verrall, of Cambridge, a member of the Society for Psychical Research. After the death of the founder, Mr. F. W. H. Myers, Professor Verrall suggested to "him" through a medium that he should give to two or three separate mediums parts of a message which would have no meaning singly, but which would make sense only when put together. Almost at once three different mediums began to receive messages, some parts in Latin, some in Greek, languages unknown to any of them. When put together, the parts corresponded as sections of a continuous statement, showing a degree of planning and purpose which it seemed impossible to attribute to the secondary personalities of the mediums. The message was of no importance in itself, but was merely a kind of literary puzzle. Still, at first sight, it seemed an impressive indication that the soul of Mr. F. W. H. Myers still existed; and several of the extremely critical and able Cambridge investigators were convinced by it. Others, however, still doubted the value of such tests.

The great difficulty is that the evidence from psychical research for the existence of the subconscious mind and its capacity for paranormal activities makes it impossible to deny that collaboration of the mediums themselves, even though unconsciously, may have been responsible for it all.

It must be said, therefore, that no certain identification of any given soul in the spirit-world has yet been attained by psychical experiments. But psychical research, by such evidences as it has attained of purely spiritual activities independently of the senses at least seems to break the ring-fence of psychical matter and energy within which materialists



sought to enclose us, thus proving the survival of the soul at least a *possibility*. Scientifically, up till now, that seems about as far as psychical research had been able to go.

## SPIRITUALISM AS A RELIGION

We must turn now to the most important aspect of our subject for the purposes of this present booklet, the transformation of Spiritualism into a religion.

When the Fox sisters commenced their table-rapping experiments in 1848, at Hydesville, N. Y., they had not the slightest idea of founding a new religion. Even Daniel Dunglas Home, who greatly extended the scope of spiritualistic exploits, adding many extraordinary physical wonders to psychological phenomena, made no attempt to fashion a religion out of the astonishing things he claimed to be able to do.

It is true that Home attributed the results he obtained to the assistance of "discarnate spirits" who made use of him as a medium; but he did not make this a matter of religious faith. For him it was merely a question of natural confidence in his own opinion; and he expected others simply to take his word for the existence and influence upon him of these "spirits." He held to this opinion even whilst religiously professing the Catholic Faith; for he had joined the Catholic Church on the score that Catholicism, with so many spirit-manifestations in the lives of the Saints, provided an atmosphere in which he would be more at home than in Protestantism. However, he did not remain a Catholic for very long. He was soon expelled from Rome, the authorities declaring that his dealings with spirits—if at all—could only be with evil spirits, and that his phenomena had nothing in common with anything in the lives of the Saints!

Even were the claim true that contact can be experimentally established with the souls of the dead, that would not pro-

vide a basis for a new religion; yet later Spiritualists made it that, securing the allegiance of probably the vast majority of those who profess belief in Spiritualism today. And all truly scientific investigators, whether they believe in the "spirit-hypothesis," as Sir William Barrett and Sir Oliver Lodge, or deny it, as Charles Richet and Harry H. Price, deplore the emergence of a new religion based on spiritualistic phenomena. Sir Oliver Lodge, in the "Encyclopaedia Britannica," regards the theological doctrines proclaimed by modern Spiritualists as unwarranted accretions. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, however, in his book "The New Revelation," (1918), insists that Spiritualism offers a total interpretation of life, philosophically and religiously; and that Christian doctrines opposed to its teachings must be abandoned!

Most spiritualistic meetings today, then, are religious services and those who attend them do so in a spirit of worship, vague as they may be as to what they are worshipping. There are hymns and announcements, Bible-reading, extempore prayers and sermons. The doctrine is one of inevitable progress in this life and the next, with sin seldom mentioned. If there are any illusions to God or to Christ, they are of a kind no orthodox Christian could accept. The service itself usually includes a seance in which a medium demonstrates the "reality" of spirit-communications, dispensing "spirit-messages" of a trivial kind to interested people present. These are accepted quite uncritically. To tell the ordinary Spiritualist that a magician could do all that the medium managed to do would make no impression at all. The will to believe is uppermost, and that is beyond the range of scientific considerations.

## THE SPIRITUALIST CREED

When we ask what doctrines Spiritualists believe, we meet with chaos. There are many Protestants who profess to be

Spiritualists and regularly attend seances, yet who deny that Spiritualism is a new and independent religion. They continue to attend Anglican, Methodist, Congregationalist Churches etc., holding that their interest in Spiritualism in no way conflicts with their church-membership.

These, however, are in the minority. Most Spiritualists insist that Spiritualism is a religion independent of any other Church-affiliations. But a division again occurs here. Many have found it hard to break completely with Christian teachings, and have founded their own Christian Spiritualist Churches. Others condemn Christianity altogether, declaring that Spiritualism has superseded it, and that they are no longer tied to a revelation of the past.

Since all Spiritualists claim to follow the guidance of their "spirit-guides," these "guides" apparently differ as much in the next world as do their disciples on earth. They have provided a host of conflicting revelations, with resultant chaos and disorder instead of any consistent body of truth. So Lord Dowding, one of the shining lights of Spiritualism, said candidly in a B.B.C. Talk in 1947: "I cannot speak for Spiritualists as a whole. No one can." He added that the nearest approach to a Creed to which probably the majority of Spiritualists—not all—would subscribe is to be found in the "Seven Points." But even those who accept the "Seven Points" do not agree as to how they are to be explained.

The "Seven Points" are said to be as follows: (1) the fatherhood of God; (2) the continuous existence of the soul; (3) the communion of spirits; (4) the brotherhood of man; (5) personal responsibility; (6) compensation and retribution; (7) endless progression. To each of these in turn we must devote a few thoughts.

## THE GOD OF SPIRITUALISTS

The general trend of messages from the "spirits" is that they know little more than we do about the ultimate nature of reality and of God. They merely claim that they are being led on to a deeper understanding and a clearer vision, and leave things as vague as that.

Spiritualists, therefore, are thrown back on their own speculations. One of their most prominent writers, Mr. J. Arthur Findlay, says in his book "Rock of Truth," that the universe is governed by Mind, "commonly called God." But he does not seem to like the term "God," and declares that all that we experience is the "Thinking Substance of the Universe" expressing Itself in some way!

In a controversy in the London "Psychic News," Feb. 9, 1957, a correspondent, J. W. T. Anderson, replied heatedly to those who wish still to believe in a "God of Love:" "Spiritualists—and I cannot forbear saying that many are in urgent need of emancipation from Christian superstition—should realize that only the Universe exists, and that this alone is God, Spinoza's 'unique self-created substance' of which we are all a part."

That, of course, is straight-out pantheism, and the end of the "Fatherhood of God." For fatherhood means personality, self-disclosure, and an individual interest which children can experience and on which they can rely. Needless to add that this impersonal "God" of the Spiritualists leaves no room for the Christian doctrine of the Holy Trinity!

## IMMORTALITY

The second principle of Spiritualism teaches the continuous existence of the soul. But an examination of this doctrine brings us up against its strange teachings concerning the nature of man.



Some Spiritualists, as Lord Dowding, think that individuals pre-exist in the spirit-world and are given the responsibility of entering into an earthly body for a life-cycle in this world. Others, however, deny pre-existence and say that our life-cycle begins when we are first born on earth.

As to our nature, Mr. H. L. Vigurs, President of the National Spiritualists' Union in England, explained in a B.B.C. Broadcast, 1948: "We Spiritualists claim that man is not merely a physical organism which just disintegrates at death. Our researches confirm the claim of Scripture that man is body, mind and spirit, although we prefer to say a physical body, an etheric body, and of course spirit. Life is a functioning of all three. Death, to us, is just the separation of the physical body from the other two." (4).

Unable to see how a spirit can act immediately on a material body, Spiritualists imagine an "etheric" body which is neither matter nor spirit, but something of both. They hold, therefore, that the human spirit has two bodies, one of flesh and blood and bones, the other an intermediate substance, animal in origin, which penetrates the carnal body and acts as intermediary between the physical senses and the spirit-world. Food taken by the physical body is "refined" for the nourishment of the "etheric" body. It is this etheric body which receives and stores up the experiences of this life.

At death this etheric body detaches itself from the carnal body and goes with the soul to the next life, continuing to exist in a kind of gaseous form. It is even claimed that the

(4) The threefold division of human nature, as given by Mr. Vigurs, is not in accordance with Scripture as he says. The favorite passage quoted is: "May the God of peace himself sanctify you in all things, that your whole spirit and soul and body may be preserved blameless." I Thess. 5:23. But St. Paul is here pleading simply for complete sanctification of both soul and body, the soul being considered under two aspects, as possessing the power to animate our material bodies, regulating their sensitive activities, and as being in its own right a spirit made in the image and likeness of God, and capable of purely intellectual and spiritual activities. Elsewhere St. Paul identifies soul and spirit as one, man consisting of body and soul only. This twofold nature of man was clearly indicated by Christ Himself when He said: "Fear not them that kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul." Matt. 10:28.

etheric body has been seen leaving the carnal body at death! In the next life the etheric body is the instrument by which the spirit continues to express itself; and also provides that relationship with this world which enables it to communicate with people living still in our material environment.

All that is sheer fantasy. Yet Lord Dowding, who rejects Christianity, said in his 1947 B.B.C. Talk, advocating such doctrines: "I believe a reasonable explanation of the universe is possible which does not need to be bolstered up by a quality miscalled 'faith,' telling us to accept as truth teachings which do violence to our intuitive preceptions."

But a reasonable explanation of the universe cannot be based on "intuitive perceptions" which constitute only a disguised wishful-thinking; and Lord Dowding's position rests on nothing better than what is rightly called credulity!

## SPIRIT-COMMUNICATIONS

The third principle tells us that, under suitable conditions, we can make contact with the spirits of deceased persons in the "etheric world." However Spiritualists may differ in other matters, all are agreed that communication with departed souls is not only possible, but that it is a fact scientifically proven by the phenomena of Spiritualism.

They insist that the inhabitants of the etheric world are willing and anxious to advise us in the solution of our problems. Unfortunately, the "spirits" themselves have repeatedly stressed the great difficulty they have in re-entering the world they have left in order to converse with us; and that they can do so only by using the mind and vocal organs or other faculties of some medium psychically attuned to the astral spheres.

Lord Dowding tells us that communication with discarnate spirits was part of the wisdom of the ancients which was suppressed by the Christian Church, but which is again available

to us—presumably since the two little girls, Margaret and Kate Fox, at Hydesville, N. Y., revealed to mankind how it is to be done!

And this is the only valid source of knowledge beyond that which can be acquired by our own efforts. "On what do I base my beliefs?" asks Dowding. He answers: "On spirit-messages, the co-operation of the great hierarchy of God's subalterns in his plan for the evolution of humanity." He informs us that there are no "devils," and that the only spirits "on the other side" whom we encounter are those of fellow human beings whose help is "a very important means of increasing our knowledge of the universe."

One must be pardoned for doubting whether their help is a very reliable means of knowledge. When challenged with the obscurity and even childishness of so many of the messages received, Spiritualists are at pains to explain that departed spirits, when liberated by death, really escaped from a body which acted like blinkers on a horse to keep their attention on the things of this life. Now free, and with enlarged interests, they do not remember very well the details of this life and become confused in their recollections of it. Hence their many mistakes. But, if that be so, the guidance of such "spirits" surely warrents little confidence. It must also be remembered that their supposed teachings have to be accepted on the authority of anonymous "controls" such as Red Cloud, White Feather, etc., with no evidence even for their existence save the word of a medium who may also, unconsciously if not consciously, distort the messages.

Despite these difficulties, however, Spiritualists are sublimely confident and regard spiritual guidance from the beyond as the only reliable source of supernatural information. Mr. J. Arthur Findlay shocked those Spiritualists who still quoted the Bible with approval by saying that it can no longer be re-

garded as a divinely-inspired book. He declared that all supernatural events in its pages, where not borrowed from pagan mythology, were but psychic phenomena. Christ Himself was not God, but simply an extremely efficient medium! And the principle of psychic interpretation is the only rule by which Scripture can be rightly understood.

However unpalatable to many Spiritualists such declarations may be—and Findlay claims to have received his teachings from the “spirits”—they are the logical outcome of the whole system of necromancy.

## THE BROTHERHOOD OF MAN

There is no need to delay upon the fourth principle of the “Brotherhood of Man,” which is not a specifically spiritualistic doctrine in whatever sense it is to be understood.

Mr. J. Arthur Findlay makes the fantastic claim that we must believe ethics should be governed by the Golden Rule, doing unto others what we would have them do to us, because this is “given from the etheric world to all who make contact with it.” But that teaching existed long before it came as any supposed message from the “spirits.” What is important to notice, however, is that Mr. Findlay’s doctrine, whilst expressed in the same terms, has not the same sense as that which Christians intend.

The “Golden Rule” in the teaching of Christ has a distinctive quality about it which makes it a very different thing from any merely humanitarian ideal. For Christians, the brotherhood of man flows from the doctrine of the Fatherhood of God. It is the fruit of our personal relationships with a personal God and includes the love of God, which is its true motive.

The lapse of Spiritualism into an impersonal pantheism necessarily results in a lapse from true and supernatural char-



ity into a natural philanthropy at best; and the "Golden Rule" in its genuine sense is not to be found on that lower level.

## PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

The fifth principle, that each individual is personally responsible for his conduct, if taken at its face value, seems acceptable enough. But Mr. Findlay tells us that its real meaning is that "each man is his own savior."

From what must man save himself? Certainly not from sin in the ordinary sense of that word. Spiritualists do not believe in sin. Original sin is not admitted. "Never was there any evidence of a Fall," writes Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in his book "The New Revelation," p. 72. Other spiritualist writers tell us that sin or what is usually called sin—is a valuable experience and quite a good thing.

In any case, according to this fifth principle, Christ is not our Savior. Those Spiritualists who do pay lip service to Him regard Him as only one of several enlightened mediums and teachers. Lord Dowding, in his 1947 B.B.C. Talk said: "On various occasions teachers have appeared on earth to impress upon us that, to be of value, knowledge must be supplemented by love. Krishna, the Lord Buddha, and the beloved Master Jesus, were perhaps the most notable."

So Christ was but an outstanding medium and reformer, who did not provide us with anything more than His teaching and example. He neither expiated our sins, nor provides us with any real assistance to rise above them. That we must do for ourselves. "Each is his own savior." So the "spirits" say!

## COMPENSATION AND RETRIBUTION

The sixth principle of Spiritualism is that "each reaps what he sows." In this life, we are told, our lower passions all clamor



for satisfaction, but the true "self" must realize the hollowness of this clamor. If illusory desires are not disciplined on earth, the soul will go to the astral world still subject to them, there to learn some very uncomfortable lessons.

Spiritualists deny that the soul will meet with any external judgment at death. It just "gravitates" automatically to its own place, the spiritual level for which it has fitted itself during its earth-life; and any rebellious lower tendencies will have to be painfully mastered.

Particularly to be noticed is that the "Seven Points" contain no reference to reincarnation; for Spiritualists are violently divided on that subject. The "spirits" themselves, through different mediums, have given the most contradictory messages concerning it. Some have said that souls go at death to endless continuity of life with friends in the next world; others insist that the continuity is broken, and that the soul, after it has forgotten its previous existence, must begin all over again by reincarnation, putting right in another earth-cycle its previous mistakes. These, although not recalled by conscious memory, will not be forgotten in the subconscious mind of the etheric body.

Thirty years ago the National Spiritualists' Association, at a Detroit Convention, U. S. A., condemned reincarnation, declaring that such a doctrine "subverts the chief premise of our teaching, which is that of continuity of life, with the recognition of departed friends and reunion with them."

But reincarnation is now being taught more and more widely by "spirit-messages" through mediums, in automatic writings, and in innumerable spiritualistic books and periodicals.

## ENDLESS PROGRESSION

The "Seventh Point" is evolution spiritualized. Spiritualism offers the consoling doctrine that there is no hell, and that no soul can ever be lost. Despite the fifth principle that "each man is his own savior," man does not really need a savior. He cannot *frustrate*, but can only *retard* a progressive development and improvement, the process of which is inevitable.

Lord Dowding offers what he considers the underlying principle explaining all things. There exists, he declares, an Absolute, Eternal and Intelligent Spirit (called God) which, by *involution* breaks itself down through grades of ever-densifying matter to the lowest physical forms of rock and metal. Then it starts on a return journey by *evolution* through the mineral, vegetable, animal, human and angelic stages, gathering all experience, back to where it was. Human beings are part of this process and are climbing, whether they know it or not. (5).

Man's highest duty, therefore, is to labor at the continual development of his own personality. His next stage of development after death will not be essentially different from this, except that it will have wider scope and be free from the limitations of space and time. There is a supra-terrestrial world of seven or eight spheres in the outermost of which dwells pure, undifferentiated Spirit, or "God." Few souls reach this exalted place, but those who do, after a period from days to centuries, discard even their etheric bodies and become "God." Evil, having been paid for in accordance with the law of cause and effect, will have then ceased to exist in them. For others, apparantly, the prospect is one of endless progress without ever arriving!

The description of the earlier stages in the beyond is frankly

(5) "Psychic News," Feb. 9, 1957.

materialistic. So Lord Dowding seriously informs us that there "we find people eating three square meals a day (quite unnecessary), or catching enormous salmon (imaginary, of course), or editing newspapers, or playing golf, or pretending to be Shakespeare, or flying, or driving racing-cars—all the things that they had wanted to do on earth." (6).

However, they soon grow out of this and "settle down to the limitless facilities for education under the guidance of wise and friendly instructors." (7).

The course may have to be interrupted by successive re-incarnations; and if individuals do not step up their rate of progress and free themselves from the wheel of re-birth into this material world, that is due mainly to the false teaching of the Churches!

How much more *convincing* all this is, we are told, than the *mystery* of the life to come as taught by orthodox Christianity, which speaks of an eternal realm of righteousness in a new order altogether, the saved finding everlasting happiness in some "Beatific Vision of God!"

## SPIRIT-HEALING

In addition to the above "Seven Points," a kind of "Eighth Principle" of "Spirit-Healing" has been introduced recently among Spiritualists.

Nineteenth century "Mesmerism" gave rise to what was called "Mental Healing." Many Protestant sects took this up, gave it a religious significance by calling it "Faith-Healing," and were loud in their denunciations of the Catholic Church for having neglected the "Ministry of Healing" as practised among the early Christians.

Not to be outdone by these progressive cults, Spiritualists

(6) Ibid.

(7) Ibid.

have adopted the practice of healing, attributing its efficacy to the influence of discarnate "spirits." Self-styled "spirit-healers" now abound, one of the most prominent of whom, Mr. Harry Edwards, in England, claims to be under the control of the "spirits" of Lord Lister and Louis Pasteur. These two geniuses in scientific medicine use him as a channel of unlimited curative forces from the astral world!

In 1956 Mr. Harry Edwards invited a Committee of the British Medical Association to examine a selected number of permanent cures he claimed to have effected in order to obtain scientific confirmation of them. To his disappointment, owing to faulty diagnosis beforehand, or to subsequent relapse, none of the cases passed the test and the Committee denied his claims to be justified.

But even if the cures had been proved, that would not in any way justify the assertion that the "spirits" of deceased persons had caused them. Such a theory is quite unfounded, and would in any case deprive such phenomena of any resemblance to cases of miraculous healing recorded in the New Testament. Neither Christ nor the Apostles claimed to heal by means of "discarnate spirits." Nor did they place reliance on "wonders" which have no lasting effect on the souls of men. Such cures may be sought from purely self-regarding motives, and they do not necessarily promote virtue and holiness. St. Paul therefore warned Christians repeatedly against setting great store on extraordinary phenomena, and bade them cultivate the "better gifts," faith, hope and charity; above all charity, especially pure and disinterested love of God.

That mind has an influence over matter, that some people with remarkable personalities have the power to make their influence particularly operative in regard to certain susceptible patients, and that many remarkable cures have been effected in such a way is beyond doubt. But these cures are due either

to intense emotional forces released within the patients themselves, or to some natural psychical power in the healer which is not yet fully understood—save of course in those rare cases where all natural factors are quite evidently to be excluded and the direct and miraculous intervention of God Himself is manifest. But no invocation of the “spirits of the dead” will accompany genuine miracles, or account for them. (8)

## VALUE OF SPIRITUALISM

There are some who think we should welcome Spiritualism as providing confirmation of the Christian religion. As we have seen, however, it is in reality an enemy of Christianity and a rival religion which wants to substitute its own fantasies and a kind of “religious secularism” for the divinely-revealed truths of the Christian Faith.

But would it not be a vital help to get absolutely convincing proof that life after death is a fact and not merely an “uncertain belief,” as Spiritualists are fond of saying?

Even to put such a question is to show almost a complete misunderstanding of the Christian religion. Apart from the merely natural assurance of sound philosophy which proves that the soul of man is of its very nature a spiritual and indestructible entity, and therefore immortal, Christians have absolute certainty of the fact by divine revelation. They neither need nor desire any support of supposedly experimental confirmations offered by Spiritualism.

Spiritualists merely *assume*, and have not yet proved that they have ever come into contact with a “discarnate spirit.” Even could they establish identity in a given case, and it were scientifically certain that a soul had survived death, that would not prove more than that some souls at least do

(8) On the subject of “faith-healing” see our booklets “Quizzes on Christian Science,” and “The Assemblies of God.”



not perish immediately with the body. Experimental proof that such continued existence will last forever is not possible.

But the fullness of Christian teaching must be considered. Spiritualism can never confirm Christian faith in the restoration of man's complete personality, which involves the mystery of the resurrection and the glorious transformation of the physical body. Nor can it confirm the Christian's faith in an eternal destiny of happiness for man, both body and soul, resulting from the Beatific Vision of God Himself.

However, putting Spiritualism aside, we can say that a strictly scientific psychical research is not without its uses, although even those are of a very limited nature. There are assured results, however meagre, proving purely psychical activities of the human mind which are irreconcilable with the creed of crass materialists. Psychical research can be said to have broken the essential argument of materialists against the *possibility* of the soul's survival and immortality.

But again a warning is necessary. Those who think they have proved the actual fact of the soul's survival, a conviction which goes beyond available scientific evidence, have not been brought any nearer to the Christian Faith because of that. Many such, as we have seen, believe only in an indefinite progress of the soul within the merely natural order towards they know not what, and have no belief in a personal God, in the Divinity of Christ, or in any Last Judgment which will decide our eternal fate.

Experimental proof of a non-material order of reality ought to make scientifically-minded men more sympathetic towards the idea of a divine revelation and less unwilling to study the evidence on its behalf. But whether or not they will attain to that faith in the Christian religion which is a gift of God is another matter altogether.

From a religious point of view, then, psychical research is

not without preparatory value in so far as it may dispose people to give serious attention to the claims of the Christian religion to be the divinely-revealed truth. More than that cannot be said. But psychical research must not be confused with Spiritualism as a religion. Far from being a help, Spiritualism as a religion is opposed to Christianity, and a very definite hindrance to it.

## CATHOLIC ATTITUDE

The verification and explanation of psychical phenomena as such are matters for scientists, and the Catholic Church is not officially interested in such pursuits any more than in any other natural, even though abnormal fields of inquiry. If, however, a supernatural origin is claimed for abnormal experiences and they are declared to have religious significance, then the Catholic Church becomes deeply concerned about them.

Now since Spiritualists claim to receive messages from the dead which have profound religious significance, either denying accepted Christian doctrines, or demanding revision of them, and also adding new teachings beyond those of Christ and the Apostles, the Catholic Church cannot but pronounce a verdict concerning their contentions and practices.

That the Catholic Church could not be expected to approach the subject of Spiritualism sympathetically should be clear from the fact that Holy Scripture itself is opposed to anything resembling its methods.

In the Old Testament necromancy, or seeking knowledge from the dead, is expressly condemned, even under the extreme penalty of death. (9).

In the New Testament cases of devil-possession abound; and even a medium who spoke the truth and praised the

(9) Ex. 22:18; Lev. 19:26,31, also 20:27; Num. 23:23; Deut. 18:10-12; 2 Chronicles (Parali-pomenon) 33:6; Is. 8:19.

mission of St. Paul and Silas was regarded as being under the influence of an evil, and not of a good spirit. Thus we read in the Acts of the Apostles: "A certain woman having a divining spirit met us, who brought to her masters much gain by her predictions . . . and she cried out: These men are the servants of the Most High God, who preach unto you the way of salvation." St. Paul exorcised her, saying to the spirit: "I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to go out from her." Acts 16:16-18.

Furthermore, the Catholic Church has ever been mindful of St. Paul's warning: "The Spirit manifestly saith that in the last times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to spirits of error and doctrines of devils." I Tim. 4:1. Always, therefore, the standing attitude of the Catholic Church towards necromancy, or attempts to communicate with the dead, has been one of condemnation.

## TRAVESTY OF RELIGION

The nature of modern Spiritualism affords the Church no reason for changing that attitude. The seance-room, with its self-hypnotized medium, and the self-seeking of curious and credulous audiences, have nothing in common with true religion.

There may be prayers and hymns at a spiritualist meeting, but the object of the seance is not that of worshipping God and seeking closer union with Him. Most of those who attend are seeking communion with the dead, the consolation of knowing that a loved one is still alive; and the purpose of the seance is accomplished if what are thought to be messages from "the other side" are received. But the self-satisfaction of getting comfort, or even valuable information, is not religion. True religion is "God-centred," not "man-centred."

As a matter of fact, Spiritualism is little interested in God,

and references to Him are casual and distant. Of His essential Holiness, and our need of sanctification that we may draw near to Him, nothing is said. There is no doctrine of divine grace. Nor is there any emphasis on sin as the one thing separating us from Him. Among spiritualistic mediums there is no Isaais crying: "Woe is me, because I am a man of unclean lips." (10). There is nothing in Spiritualism to disturb any Spiritualist's good opinion or himself!

The Christian religion tells us of a personal God who has broken through into this world of ours, confronting men, showing them to be sinful and in need of redemption, and offering to raise them spiritually and supernaturally to a new level on which they can live in union with Him with the help of His grace. But there is nothing of this in the so-called "spirit-messages." They reflect only the secular ideas of the average man in the street. All notions are of this world. "Raymond" spoke to his father, Sir Oliver Lodge, of trees, of houses of brick and mortar, and even of whiskies and soda in the world beyond! Baron von Hugel rightly said: "One never gets any spiritual ideas out of Spiritualism."

## OFFICIAL CONDEMNATIONS

On two occasions the Catholic Church has issued official condemnations of all such efforts to get into communication with the dead. In 1898 the Holy Office forbade efforts to do so by involuntary and "guided" practices such as those involving automatic writing, the use of planchette or ouija boards, or in other ways. In 1917, when great impetus was given to Spiritualism towards the close of the First World War, the Holy Office, by a further decree, forbade all attendance at spiritualistic seances, whether as active participants or merely as onlookers.

(10) Is. 6:5.

These decrees are of a disciplinary nature. They imply no decision as to the character of spiritualistic phenomena. Such phenomena may be explicable by the entirely natural psychic forces of living people still in this world; or they may—at least sometimes—be due to diabolical intervention, a supposition not lightly to be dismissed.

Scientific psychical research as such is not opposed in any way to the Catholic religion. Difficulty here arises from the fact that many psychical effects can be produced only with the aid of a medium and in the atmosphere provided by a spiritualistic seance. For the study of these phenomena a Catholic scientist would be granted permission by a Bishop to be present at such a seance; but the Catholic scientist's reasons for being there, and the frame of mind with which he attended, would be very different from those of others.

The Catholic Church knows how to distinguish between legitimate scientific investigation, and superstitious abuses. She forbids attendance at seances to all except those dispensed for the reasons given, because ill-instructed, curious and emotional people can easily become superstitious victims of an unhealthy attraction for the occult, with resultant harm to themselves not only religiously, but mentally, morally, and even physically also.

## CONCLUSION

Such, then, is Spiritualism, a religion of vague deism or pantheism, full of heretical denials and assertions, and incapable of lifting souls to God. It knows nothing of contrition, of the fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom, of genuine spirituality; and no Christian should have anything to do with it.

One cannot help but feel that many non-Catholics have turned to it largely because, through no fault of their own,



they have been deprived of the full Christian truth to be found in the Catholic religion only. Left with no clear ideas of the after-life, they have been unable to resist seeking some kind of contact with departed loved ones with the aid of their entranced mediums. They may think that they get in touch with "unseen reality" by such means in a way far superior to that of Catholics; but of their cult Father Thurston, S.J. has well said: "The 'New Revelation' has not justified itself except as a new revelation of the readiness with which men are deceived and carried about with every wind of doctrine." (11).

Catholics know that the spirit-world exists; they believe in the "Communion of Saints," the common union of all who are in Christ; and they know that they can unite themselves better with those who have gone before them by prayer than by psychic experiments; at the Altar rather than in the seance-room.

For it is in Catholicism that one finds the fullness of the promises made in the Gospel; the resources which make possible that interior spiritual change which, in our better moments, we all desire; and the life of grace derived from Christ, a life more powerful than bodily death, which has no effect upon it.

We Catholics hold that death has indeed been conquered. "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." I Cor. 15:26. But this has been done by the victory of the Risen Christ over it. And we know that those who are living members of His Mystical Body, the Catholic Church, already share in that victory.

(11) "Spiritualism," H. Thurston S. J., P. 15.

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